# EXHIBIT 94

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# INCITEMENT

## ANWAR AL-AWLAKI'S WESTERN JIHAD

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*Alexander Meleagrou-Hitchens*

*For Lee-Anne, Leonidas, and Aristos*

# Introduction

A YOUNG WESTERN-EDUCATED Nigerian Muslim attempts to use a bomb hidden in his underwear to bring down a U.S.-bound jet from Amsterdam; a British-Bangladeshi woman attacks and repeatedly stabs her local Member of Parliament in London; a U.S. Army Major carries out a mass shooting at his base in Fort Hood, Texas, killing thirteen; the offices of the *Charlie Hebdo* magazine in Paris are attacked and its staff massacred; two Kyrgyzstani-American brothers set off deadly explosions at the Boston Marathon. All of these cases of jihadist terrorism in the West, and many more besides, appear disconnected in any formal organizational sense. However, they are linked through a set of ideas introduced to them by a man whose name continues to resurface in connection with jihadist violence in the West: the al-Qaeda ideologue and strategist Anwar al-Awlaki.

Born in Las Cruces, New Mexico, to Yemeni parents in 1971, Awlaki began his career as an Islamic preacher in Colorado in the early 1990s. Unlike other Western jihadist figureheads, Awlaki was initially a re-vered mainstream Islamic preacher in America who was considered to be a legitimate authority on the religion by a large swathe of Western Muslims. Before moving to Yemen in 2004 and eventually joining

al-Qaeda, he held a number of senior positions at American Islamic institutions and produced many hours of lectures about various facets of Islam and its relevance to Western Muslims. The status he earned during the early stages of his career gave him a profile and reach far in excess of other Western jihadist preachers who were able to draw in only a limited number of hard-core followers. He was a star of YouTube, the emblem of a millennial spirit that many in the West never stumbled upon—until his name began to emerge in connection with a string of terrorist plots. The threat Awlaki would eventually come to pose to the United States was considered so severe that, following the killing of Osama bin Laden in May 2011, he became the number one target of President Barack Obama's expansive drone program. Just four months after the Bin Laden operation in Abbottabad, Pakistan, Awlaki was killed by remote control while being driven through the deserts of northern Yemen.

How to measure the influence of a man who might well be considered the Pied Piper of Western jihad? There are various quantitative studies related to Awlaki's influence on jihadist terrorism in the West. My own research finds that, between 2009 and 2016, of the 212 total cases of individuals charged in America for jihadist-related offenses, sixty-six were in some way inspired by or linked to Awlaki.[1] The New America Foundation, a think tank based in Washington, D.C., similarly found that, between January 2007 and January 2015, Awlaki influenced, and in some cases was in direct contact with, sixty-three out of a total of 259 individuals who were either convicted of terrorism-related offenses in U.S. courts or died in the process of their attacks.[2] A more recent study, based on the court filings for 101 Americans indicted for Islamic State–related offenses, links Awlaki and his outreach efforts to twenty-four different cases. This makes him only marginally less referenced as an inspiration than the former head of the Islamic State (IS), Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, and significantly more so than Osama bin Laden.[3] In the United Kingdom, a study of thirteen terrorism cases between

2004 and 2017 involving forty-eight individuals who were convicted for terrorism offenses or died carrying out attacks found that Awlaki's work represented six out of the twelve most popular media found in their possession by investigators.[4]

Number-crunching studies of this kind can tell us only so much. That numerous Western jihadists are found in possession of Awlaki's materials neither proves nor explains how he was a key inspiration in each case where his name appears. What it does demonstrate, however, is that Awlaki's works are, and have been for some time, on the essential reading (or viewing and listening) list for Western Salafi-jihadists. It is hard to exaggerate his influence. Awlaki offered the most comprehensive presentation of Salafi-jihadist ideology in English, and in a Western context. His lectures and sermons have helped to embed this ideology in the West, in large part because of his success in making it resonate with the experiences of Western Muslims. He played a central role in ensuring that Salafi-jihadism was no longer seen as a set of foreign ideas, related solely to overseas conflicts and the sectarian convulsions of the Arab world. It has now become its own counterculture *within* the West, one of the most violent and rapidly evolving of its kind.

Without Awlaki, it is unlikely that Salafi-jihadism would have gained this sort of traction in the West. First and foremost, he helped to convey a stark sense of Muslim victimhood—a notion from which the ideology draws much of its succor—among Western, English-speaking Muslims. He presented them with an image of a "war on Islam" in terms that made it more relevant to their lives, framing disparate events involving Muslims as part of a wider conspiracy. No longer would this Western, secular "plot" to destroy Islam and oppress Muslims be presented only in terms of foreign wars and occupations in distant lands. It was, according to Awlaki, a much more immediate threat, taking place right under their noses. If they did not act soon, he warned his followers, they too would eventually fall victim. Awlaki's intimate knowledge of the interests, fears, and concerns of Western Muslims ensured that he was

Over the last decade and a half, numerous theories and models have emerged that attempt to explain this phenomenon. Many of these are divided in their approach between a focus on either top-down or bottom-up processes. The former tend to emphasize propaganda or external radicalizers. Conversely, bottom-up theories argue that an individual's radicalization is a grassroots process that comes about because of one's interaction in tight-knit groups with links to wider social networks. This book leans toward the former approach, focusing on the efforts made by Awlaki to attract new recruits. At the same time, it recognizes that why and how those individuals were receptive to such outreach in the first place is related to bottom-up dynamics such as the influence of their preexisting friendship or kinship group and other socio-psychological factors.

The most comprehensive radicalization theories draw from a range of disciplines, including social science, sociology, psychology, and history. These usefully identify a range of factors that influence involvement in terrorism, and the insights they provide shed light on Awlaki's impact. For instance, many theories acknowledge the importance of charismatic leadership figures who exploit and exacerbate a number of other factors that contribute to the radicalization process.[9] One of these is situational push factors often related to grievances based on negative social or political experiences that create a turning point in an individual's life, leading to a "cognitive opening." This makes them receptive to new ideas and worldviews; they become, in effect, a "seeker" who, in their search for meaning, is taken in by an ideology that makes sense of the world around them and offers an explanation for their problems and the blueprint for the realization of a (frequently utopian) new world.[10]

Studies also place some importance on identity. It is widely understood that extremist groups exploit an identity crisis that their target audience may be experiencing after reaching a turning point in their lives.[11] By defining and creating an "in-group" for a recruit to join, they

also identify the "out-group" that is the cause of their problems and that must be fought and resisted.[12] Haroro Ingram explains how leadership figures like Awlaki can be understood as "architects of identity" who are able to construct both in-groups and out-groups in order to "shape their followers' cognitive perceptions and mobilize them towards collective action."[13] At his most effective, Awlaki was able to *create* meaning for his followers by identifying new grievances (or exploiting preexisting ones), constructing a new collective identity, and creating frames through which they could comprehend the world around them. This skill alone, however, was not enough. Just as important as Awlaki's framing efforts were his credibility and sacred authority. His reputation established him as a legitimate authority on Islam and gave him a large base of would-be disciples who were only too willing to uncritically adopt the frames he created.

### Theoretical Parameters: From Radicalization to Social Movements

Some have criticized the radicalization literature both for its attempts to force individual cases, idiosyncrasies and all, into theoretical models and for its treatment of Salafi-jihadist violence as an isolated and novel phenomenon.[14] Detractors argue that, as a result, many scholars have ignored past research into recruitment and mobilization that can contribute to our understanding of the current wave of religious violence. A corrective to this tendency has come in the form of the application of social movement theory (SMT). Diani defines a social movement as: "a network of informal interactions between a plurality of individuals, groups and/or organizations, engaged in a political or cultural conflict, on the basis of a shared collective identity."[15] SMT refers to a set of theories that attempt to explain how and why people and groups become involved in various forms of collective action, or what is often

termed as contentious politics.[16] This describes collective efforts to bring about political or social change to the status quo, often through the use of activism to pressure governments or other institutions.

It has been suggested that Salafi-jihadist groups are best understood as part of a wider social movement and that terrorism should be regarded as simply a form of contentious politics.[17] As such, Salafi-jihadist activism is said to share many of the dynamics of non-Islamic social movements.[18] Wiktorowicz therefore argues that studying jihadi activism by drawing on frameworks used to analyze a range of social movements helps to "provide a more comprehensive understanding of Islamic activism by exploring understudied mechanisms of contention."[19] This approach goes beyond the specificity of any single movement and allows for "greater theoretical leverage and comparative evidence for elucidating the dynamics of Islamist contention."[20] Similarly, Gunning claims that approaching the study of militant organizations and movements using SMT helps to provide the kind of historical context that scholars such as Silke, della Porta, and Ranstorp have often found wanting in terrorism research.[21] This also serves to "de-exceptionalise" the phenomena of terrorism and radicalization by analyzing them "as part of a wider, evolving spectrum of movement tactics."[22]

The social movement perspective offers useful tools for understanding how Awlaki fulfilled his role as a movement leadership figure. Despite his eventual affiliation with AQAP, Awlaki's work was conspicuous by its lack of sustained reference to al-Qaeda or any other specific jihadist group. This is because he recognized the power of social movements over formal organizations: while the latter are subject to collapse after the death of leadership figures or military defeat, social movements are more agile and resilient. Awlaki therefore emphasized the creation of a Western iteration of the global jihad movement, which he hoped would survive and grow based on the power and relevance of its ideas. This book presents Awlaki as what social movement scholars refer to as a "movement entrepreneur" for the global jihad

movement in the West. Such figures, according to Tarrow, use "contention to exploit political opportunities, create collective identities," and mobilize individuals "against more powerful opponents."[23]

There are two specific components of the social movement theory approach that provide insight into Awlaki's efforts: framing theory and collective identity construction. Framing theory is premised upon the claim that individuals act within a movement because they have adopted a version of reality that has been constructed by its leadership figures.[24] It is concerned with how ideas and events are strategically presented in order to encourage recruitment and mobilization. Movements, according to this theory, establish what are referred to as "collective action frames" through which they ask their audiences to view and respond to the world around them.[25]

There are three core types of frame that are central to this study: diagnostic, prognostic, and motivational. Diagnostic frames identify the problem faced by a movement's target audience and apportion blame for the situation they are in.[26] Prognostic frames identify a range of solutions to the problem, including offering new strategies, tactics, and targets to be pursued by the movement.[27] While the first two framing tasks are geared toward creating a new perception of the world, the third, motivational framing, addresses the question of taking action. Snow and Byrd describe this using the metaphor of moving people "from the balcony to the barricade"—once they have accepted the diagnostic and prognostic frames, they still require the motivation to personally take part in the mission of the social movement.[28] Motivational frames are therefore a "call to arms," providing the impetus to take part in action.

In order for frames to be effective, they must resonate with the beliefs and experiences of the target audience. This process of "frame alignment" involves a strategic effort by social movements to attach their frames to the immediate interests and concerns of a given population.[29] Part of understanding Awlaki's impact will therefore include an appreciation for how he used his knowledge of the interests, fears,

more concerned with the establishment of political activist organizations, the best known of which is the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood, founded by Hasan al-Banna in 1928.

Islamists regard Islam as a political system that, through its primary texts, provides the blueprint for the creation of a state and constitution, ideally in the form of the Caliphate.[44] In a similar fashion to the Salafi approach, many Islamist movements call for a return to the scriptural foundations of Islam, but they diverge from most Salafis in that they reinterpret these and apply them to modern social and political issues.[45] These primary texts of Islam are seen by Islamists as sources of divine guidance on worship and human behavior but also as an antidote to the cultural dominance of the morally corrupt West and its allies within the *ummah*.[46] Islamist groups and movements pursue a variety of methods, from political and democratic engagement to militancy.[47]

## Purpose and Structure of the Book

Despite being the subject of intense interest, there are few rigorous studies devoted to understanding Awlaki's impact.[48] In an attempt to address this deficit, this book sets out to answer three interrelated questions: What factors influenced Awlaki's transformation into a jihadist and recruiter for the global jihad movement? What methods did he use to make the movement appeal to his audience? And finally, what features of Awlaki's messaging are apparent in cases of Western Muslims who were inspired by his work to take part in violence in the name of global jihad? The structure of the book is largely dictated by these questions.

The first chapter provides a brief biographical overview of Awlaki's time in America, the United Kingdom, and Yemen. While not delving into any great detail, much of which has been covered by other researchers, it allows us to understand the milieus and organizations he

was involved with, offering some context to his output during different periods of his career. The discursive analysis of Awlaki's output begins in Chapter 2, which looks at his earliest works that are popularly considered to be representative of mainstream Islamic thought. Chapter 3 focuses on the Salafi-jihadist phase of Awlaki's career. It demonstrates how, by drawing on stories from Islamic history and Salafi-jihadist ideology, Awlaki's messaging efforts are best understood in the context of how social movement leaders inspire action. Chapter 4 assesses Awlaki's strategic contribution to the global jihad movement by showing how, through an adaptation of the propaganda of the deed concept, he recognized the communicative and didactic power of violence.

These opening four chapters of the book are, in part, concerned with where Awlaki fits within the spectrum and confluence of Salafism and Islamism. In doing so, I hope to categorize and offer a new analysis of Awlaki's ideological influences. This, in turn, will also provide insight into why and how he gravitated toward Salafi-jihadism later on in his career. Awlaki's turn to violence and the influence he has on Western jihadists are vital components of the story of the global jihad movement in the West. An analysis of both his ideological evolution—from activist Salafism to Salafi-jihadism—and the impact of his messaging will contribute to our knowledge on the movement's establishment in the English-speaking world.

Chapters 5, 6, and 7 are based around case studies of three Muslims in the West—Umar Farouk Abdulmutallab, Nidal Hasan, and Zachary Chesser—who, at least in part, were influenced by Awlaki to become involved in the global jihad movement. These cases were chosen because each represented one of a number of the more popular forms of jihadist mobilization in the West. Abdulmutallab, following a more "traditional" terrorist pathway, traveled to AQAP territory in Yemen, received training, and tried to return to the West and commit an attack. Hasan, however, was a lone actor. He chose to remain in his home country, had no face-to-face interactions with any terrorist groups, and

planned and carried out a mass shooting in the name of the global jihad movement entirely on his own. Finally, Chesser began his jihadi career as a propagandist in America, creating English-language jihadi media that encouraged others to take a more active part in the movement. His involvement in this relatively low-risk form of activism eventually encouraged him to take more direct action, and he was planning to leave the United States and join the al-Qaeda-aligned Somali militia al-Shabaab before being arrested.

The focus in each of these case studies is mostly on the observable impact that Awlaki's messaging had on these individuals at certain key moments of vulnerability in their lives, rather than on the preexisting factors that drew them to search out and become receptive to extremist messaging. The book ends with a discussion of Awlaki's enduring legacy since his death. In particular, it demonstrates how his work directly influenced both IS English-language messaging and Westerners who joined the group or acted on its behalf.

This book is not a biography of Awlaki.[49] Rather, it is an effort to contribute to the discussion of Salafi-jihadism in the West and Awlaki's involvement in its establishment and expansion by providing an intellectual history of one of the most influential American Salafi-jihadists. It also places him within a historical context of the ideas a string of Salafi and Islamist thinkers formulated and the strategies they developed to implement them. The story of how Awlaki came to become the face of Western jihad is as remarkable as it is unique. Due to a confluence of factors including the timing of major global events and Awlaki's early career choices, it is unlikely that any other Western Salafi-jihadist preacher will ever replicate the success and influence he achieved. Awlaki helped Americans and other English-speaking Westerners better understand both the theory and praxis of the global jihad movement to a larger degree than any of his contemporaries. As we shall see, his legacy lives on today.

# PART ONE

# THE MAKING OF A GLOBAL JIHADIST LEADER

1

# From America to Yemen

Anwar al-Awlaki's ideology was, in part, shaped by his own personal experiences and the relationships he forged with influential individuals and institutions during his time in the United States, Britain, and Yemen. Before analyzing his beliefs and teachings, it is important to first briefly map out his personal development and career path. This will help to place Awlaki against the backdrop of other Islamic intellectual discursive trends in the West and broader political developments as they relate to Muslims, Western security, foreign policy, and the concept of the *ummah*.

### Awlaki in the United States

Anwar al-Awlaki began his career in the United States, where, among other postings, he was the imam of the Dar al-Hijrah Mosque in Falls Church, Virginia, and the Muslim chaplain of George Washington University between 2001 and 2002. His first appointment as an imam was in 1994 at a local Islamic center, where he would give occasional lectures while pursuing a degree in civil engineering at Colorado State

University (CSU). While Awlaki was at CSU, he was involved with the Muslim Students Association (MSA) and even served as the president of the CSU chapter of the group. His association with this organization gives us an early clue about Awlaki's initial ideological influences. The MSA represents one of the first efforts by the Saudi Education Ministry and its Muslim Brotherhood allies in the Kingdom to influence Islam in the United States.[1] It was set up in 1963 with Saudi funds by Iraqi-born Muslim Brotherhood members Ahmad Sakr, Ahmed Totonji, and Jamal Barzinji.[2] The organization was not an effort to establish Salafi-jihadism in the United States and had no interest in direct violence against the country. It did, however, begin a mission to spread the teachings of Islamist ideologues such as Sayyid Qutb among U.S. Muslims as part of a desire to steer the future direction of the religion in the United States.[3] Awlaki's early involvement with groups that had such ideological leanings is unsurprising given that they also reflected his own early influences, which will be discussed in more detail in the following chapters.

In 1993, while living in Colorado, Awlaki also traveled to Afghanistan in the hope of assisting the *mujahidin* who were fighting the Soviet occupation of the country between 1979 and 1989. After growing up hearing stories about the glorious fight against the Russians from Yemeni veterans and watching countless propaganda videos, he was inspired to go see for himself what they had achieved. However, the war was over by this point, and he gained little of note from the trip apart from perhaps a firmer sense of his burgeoning new identity as a pious, activist Muslim living in the West. As well as sporting an Afghan-style hat around the Colorado State campus following his return, he took to quoting Abdullah Azzam, a leader of the Afghan resistance and one of the intellectual forefathers of the Salafi-jihadist movement.[4]

Even from the start of his career as a preacher, Awlaki demonstrated that rare ability to influence and captivate young Muslims in the West, and he used this skill to motivate them to fight for Islam. After gradu-

ating from Colorado State University, he moved to Denver in 1995 and soon became a part-time imam at the Denver Islamic Society, based in the city's al-Noor Mosque.[5] During his time there, he encouraged a Saudi student to travel to Chechnya to take part in the jihad against the Russians.[6] "He had a beautiful tongue," according to a senior member of a local Denver mosque who saw Awlaki in action, and he would use it to recruit for jihad as soon as he was able. This was a skill he refined in later years to devastating effect. The same elder later confronted Awlaki about his efforts to popularize jihad and his recruitment of the young Saudi, telling him, "Don't talk to my people about jihad." It is also telling how the elder chose to characterize the difference between his approach to Islam and Awlaki's: "My way was *dawah* [proselytizing]. . . . His way was *jihadi*."[7]

As his reputation began to grow, Awlaki caught the attention of a young Colorado-based Saudi Arabian businessman and entrepreneur named Homaidan al-Turki. He soon recognized the potential of the young preacher. After hearing him in person, al-Turki approached Awlaki with an offer to record, produce, and distribute his lectures as CD box sets under the imprint of his Colorado-based company al-Basheer Publications.[8] The marketing campaign that al-Turki cultivated around Awlaki is one of the main reasons for Awlaki's early popularity. Up until this point, much of the Islamic media produced in the United States was crude and amateurish, often found on homemade audio tapes. Awlaki published five of his most popular lecture series with al-Basheer, and the covers and CD of the box sets were professionally designed.[9] As a result of this palpable difference with the rest of the field, Awlaki's lectures stood out.

Along with the design of the CDs, al-Turki also introduced innovations in the content of Awlaki's lectures, splicing the voices of popular koranic reciters into the lectures; when Awlaki cited Koranic verses during a lecture, a melodic rendition would follow. Al-Turki also ensured that the CD box sets were widely distributed, hiring eager young

American Muslims to set up stalls at every major Islamic conference in the country. One of his employees was Tariq Nelson, a young American convert to Salafism who would eventually undergo his own radicalization before turning his back on extremism. According to him, at the conferences where he sold the CDs, the al-Basheer stall was the by far the most expensively adorned and popular: "He invested so much into it at a time when this business [selling Islamic lectures in English] was still in its infancy. Al-Turki used Awlaki to take it to the next level."[10]

In 1996, not long after Awlaki's confrontation with the local elder, he moved to San Diego, California, where he became the imam at the Arribat al-Islami mosque. It was during this time that he first attracted interest from the authorities; over the next four years, he would become the subject of two FBI investigations. The first, a short-lived inquiry in June 1999, looked into Awlaki's connections with a man named Ziyad Khalil, who at the time was thought to be a "procurement agent" for Osama bin Laden, though the investigation came to nothing.[11] The second investigation, in 2000, was launched in order to clarify his relationship with the "blind sheikh" Omar Abdel Rahman, who was involved in the plotting of the 1993 World Trade Center bombing. Again, the investigation led nowhere, and Awlaki fell off the radar.[12] Despite his ongoing connections to both individuals and organizations under suspicion by investigators, in 2000 the FBI closed its file on Awlaki.

One of the "suspect organizations" Awlaki was linked to was the Charitable Society for Social Welfare (CSSW), which tax records show Awlaki was vice president of in 1998 and 1999.[13] The CSSW was the American wing of al-Islah, an Islamist Yemeni political party headed by Sheikh Abdul Majid al-Zindani.[14] A few years later, in February 2004, Zindani was designated by the U.S. Treasury Department as a "Specially Designated Global Terrorist" and the CSSW as a front for al-Qaeda.[15] The FBI's interest in Awlaki would be reignited after 9/11 when it emerged during investigations into the planning of the attacks that Awlaki had developed a relationship with 9/11 hijackers Nawaf

al-Hazmi, Khalid al-Mihdhar, and Hani Hanjour.[16] The 9/11 Commission Report claims that the men greatly respected Awlaki as a religious figure and that al-Hazmi and al-Mihdhar developed a close relationship with him after they moved to San Diego in early 2000 and began attending his lectures at the Arribat al-Islami mosque.[17] It is also believed that he was their spiritual advisor while they were living in the city and that he held a number of closed-door meetings with both of the men.[18]

During his time in San Diego, Awlaki's family persuaded him to apply for appropriate doctoral programs so that he could continue his studies following his graduation from CSU in 1994. Ceding to the pressure, he applied and was accepted at George Washington University in Washington, D.C. As part of an agreement to waive his tuition fees, Awlaki also became Muslim chaplain of the university.[19] While still in Colorado, he sought to better understand how people become effective leaders and influence people, reading books related to the topic including Stephen R. Covey's *The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People.* Awlaki pursued this interest more seriously at George Washington, and his official academic transcript issued by the university's Graduate School of Education and Development includes some interesting details. His major was Human Resource Development, and he took courses titled "Group Dynamics in Organization" and "Leadership in Organizations," receiving an overall grade point average of 3.75.[20] From the start of his career, Awlaki saw himself as a leadership figure, and many who knew and worked with him also saw his potential and the charisma and intelligence he had at his disposal to become a highly influential person.

In January 2001, Awlaki was offered the post of imam at the Dar al-Hijrah mosque in Falls Church, Virginia, one of the biggest and most influential mosques in the area. Similar to the MSA, it too was the result of a growing Saudi-backed Islamist influence in the United States and was founded in the early 1990s through the joint efforts of the Saudi

Embassy's Religious Affairs Office and the Muslim American Society (MAS), another Muslim Brotherhood–influenced organization.[21]

One of the future 9/11 hijackers Awlaki first met in San Diego—Nawaf al-Hazmi—also soon moved to northern Virginia and began attending the Dar al-Hijrah mosque, where he was joined by another member of the cell, Hani Hanjour. It was also at the mosque where they met Eyad al-Rababah, a Jordanian who helped them find an apartment. Rababah would later tell investigators that a chance meeting with al-Hazmi at the mosque led to him helping the young Saudis find somewhere to live. The 9/11 Commission Report is skeptical about this, stating that "some investigators suspect that Aulaqi may have tasked Rababah to help al-Hazmi and Hanjour. We share that suspicion, given the remarkable coincidence of Aulaqi's prior relationship with Alhazmi."[22]

After 9/11, Awlaki's connections with three of the hijackers made him an obvious suspect. In subsequent interviews with the FBI, he recognized a photo of al-Hazmi but denied any knowledge of what the al-Qaeda member was involved in. Despite a number of interviews and investigations, the FBI was unable to obtain enough evidence to charge Awlaki with any terrorist activity. In 2003, investigators working for the 9/11 Commission attempted to approach Awlaki in order discuss these connections further, but by this time he had already left the country. The report nonetheless strikes a suspicious tone about Awlaki's involvement, suggesting that al-Hazmi's arrival at Dar al-Hijrah shortly after Awlaki's appointment as its imam "may not have been coincidental."[23]

Awlaki's involvement with Hanjour, al-Hazmi, and al-Mihdhar remains one of the unsolved mysteries of his time in the United States. How much, if anything, he knew about the coming attacks and the involvement of these three men may never be fully uncovered. That Awlaki, even after openly associating with al-Qaeda for around eight years after 9/11, never made any claims about this suggests that he had

no direct knowledge or involvement. Otherwise it would be hard to believe that, during a phase when he was attempting to build up his jihadist credentials, he would not have taken credit for the biggest success the global jihad movement has ever achieved against its archenemy.

Either way, the 9/11 attacks and their immediate aftermath mark an early major watershed in Awlaki's career, and it is at this stage that he emerged as a popular figure and began to cultivate a public profile outside of Western Muslim circles. He soon gained a reputation as the Muslim-American voice against al-Qaeda and Osama bin Laden. During that early scramble by the U.S. media to find answers about Islam and a friendly face to provide them, Awlaki became a favored source of quotes and soundbites. Along with his usual congregation, one of his first sermons after 9/11 was also attended by a gaggle of reporters. Awlaki would be followed around and interviewed for months.

There is no doubting that Awlaki provided just the message that was needed at the time. In sermons that were recorded by major media outlets, he spoke favorably about the "freedom" and "opportunity" that Muslims were able to enjoy in the United States. In a private email to his brother about 9/11, Awlaki declared how upset he was at the "horrible" attacks while also seemingly reveling in the spotlight which he found himself in: "the media are all over us . . . ABC, NBC, CBS, and the Washington Post." He hoped that he would be able to use this attention "for the good" of all U.S. Muslims.[24] One of his first public comments on the topic came in October 2001, when he spoke to the *New York Times* about the threat emanating from al-Qaeda: "In the past we were oblivious. We didn't really care much because we never expected things to happen. Now I think things are different. . . . There were some statements that were inflammatory, and were considered just talk, but now we realize that talk can be taken seriously and acted upon in a violent radical way."[25]

From this early stage, Awlaki's use of terms such as *violent* and *radical* demonstrates his acute awareness of Western discourse about terrorism and radicalization, while also acknowledging the link between ideas and action. His finger was on the pulse not only of Western Muslim thought but also of the wider Western political discourse of the moment. In the same month, for example, he told the *Washington Times* that "Muslims still see [Bin Laden] as a person with extremely radical ideas. But he has been able to take advantage of the sentiment that is out there regarding U.S. foreign policy. . . . We're totally against what the terrorists had done. We want to bring those who had done this to justice. But we're also against the killing of civilians in Afghanistan."[26]

Despite claiming to be against the violence of al-Qaeda, Awlaki drew a moral equivalence between the 9/11 attacks and the U.S. military response in Afghanistan. Though this is a common theme within Islamist discourse, it would also be familiar to any person following Western political and polemical discussions on the subject at the time. Filmed in October 2001 during a program about him for the television channel PBS, Awlaki again drew comparisons between U.S. foreign policy and the attacks, appealing to a certain segment of popular political thought that was emerging in response to 9/11. He suggested that although al-Qaeda acted erroneously, it was a response to U.S. aggression against Muslims around the world: "The fact that the U.S. has administered the death and homicide of over 1 million civilians in Iraq [due to U.S.-backed UN sanctions]; the fact that the U.S. is supporting the deaths and killing of thousands of Palestinians does not justify the killing of one U.S. civilian in New York City and Washington, D.C."[27]

At this early stage in his career, one can already sense his invocation of the war on Islam as the main diagnostic frame through which he wanted his audience to view global and local events. In the same interview, Awlaki suggested that, due to its alliances with Arab dictators, it was the United States that was chiefly to blame for the problems

Muslims face in the Middle East. The current Arab governments, he elaborated, "are dictatorships, tyrannical, totalitarian regimes—and if it was not for the U.S. backing them, they would crumble one after another."[28] Awlaki's comments here about the United States propping up oppressive regimes in the Arab world were in line with bin Laden's reasons for planning 9/11: the necessity of destroying the "far enemy," represented by the United States, so that secular Arab regimes would be powerless to stop the establishment of Islamic law.[29]

Awlaki seemed to agree with al-Qaeda's analysis and diagnosis of the problems with the current world order as it related to Muslims. He did not at this point publicly share its prognosis, namely a call for violence and the targeting of civilians and other American interests in order to alter the global balance of power. Rather, he said that America had to do more to "support freedom and human rights in the Muslim world" if it was to ensure against future attacks.[30] It should be noted, however, that this is not a view held only by al-Qaeda. Taken together with his comments about violent radicalism and the invasion of Afghanistan, it is clear that Awlaki was adept at finding a wider resonance for his messages by drawing on mainstream political arguments and ideas familiar to many Westerners.

This desire to appeal to as wide an audience as possible may also explain why, in a 17 September 2001 interview with *Islam Online*—at the time one of the most popular Islamic online portals run the by spiritual head of the Muslim Brotherhood, Yusuf al-Qaradawi—Awlaki strongly suggested that the Israeli intelligence agency Mossad was involved in planning the attacks in Washington, D.C., and New York. By this point, less than a week after 9/11, conspiracy theories had already started to take hold—especially in the virtual realm—in which, along with the U.S. president, Israel became a prime suspect. Asked about the true perpetrators, Awlaki responded by pointing out that "as far as I am concerned, we, the American public have NOT been presented with any solid evidence of who did it."[31] Later in the interview, he took

this even further when asked if he thought Mossad was involved: "Israel was going through a serious PR crisis . . . there were lawsuits filed against the war criminal [then Israeli Prime Minister] Ariel Sharon in Belgium. That was a serious blow to Israel to have its highest official in such a position." He ended with that favorite refrain of the conspiracy theorist, asking if the timing of the attacks "raise a question mark???"[32] This type of discourse, although popular with many Islamists and Salafis, is certainly not exclusive to them. Taken on their own, Awlaki's arguments here could be easily attributed to certain sections of the conspiratorial and populist far left or far right.

None of the above, it must be said, provides any evidence that Awlaki began his career as a covert al-Qaeda supporter. But, the mixed messages do suggest that he was willing to say what he assessed his audience at a given time wanted to hear. When speaking to the American media, he provided condemnations of mass murder, rejected al-Qaeda, and praised American values. When answering questions during a more private online conversation, he dabbled in conspiracy theories that he would not have dared bring up in a more public setting.

Despite his apparent mistrust of the official government line on the perpetrators of the 9/11 attacks, Awlaki remained in demand in both media and official circles. Five months after his *Islam Online* interview, in February 2002, he was invited to speak at a luncheon at the Pentagon titled "Islam and Middle Eastern Politics and Culture." At the event, he apparently impressed attending staff at the Department of Defense. In an email sent to the lunch invitees, a Defense Department lawyer remarked how much she enjoyed his contribution: "I had the privilege of hearing one of Mr. Awlaki's presentations in November and was impressed both by the extent of his knowledge and by how he communicated that information and handled a hostile element in the audience. I particularly liked how he addressed how the average Middle Eastern person perceives the United States and his views on the international media."[33]

Adding to the inconsistent nature of Awlaki's messaging, within a month of meeting U.S. government officials, he took to the podium at Dar al-Hijrah and delivered a Friday sermon in which he laid out what he saw as a wide-ranging conspiracy to attack and destroy Islam under the guise of the George W. Bush administration's newly launched "War on Terror." This theme would dominate much of his framing from this point on, and his views on how Muslims should react to this threat would be subject to drastic shifts over the coming years.

Awlaki left the United States soon after this to live briefly in London. While he returned on a number of occasions, he was never again to reside in the United States.[34] The reasons why Awlaki decided to leave remain unclear, although they were not unrelated to the increased scrutiny he found himself under following the revelations about his links to three of the 9/11 hijackers. Years later, Awlaki would claim that he left after deciding that the persecution of Muslims in the United States by the U.S. government had reached unbearable levels, putting him and his fellow Muslims in grave danger.[35]

A senior imam at Dar al-Hijrah and friend of Awlaki's named Johari Abdul Malik tried to convince the preacher to stay but was unable to sway him. Sitting in his former colleague's old office at the mosque, Abdul Malik recounted how, during a meeting between the two, Awlaki "told me he wanted to leave because he was under a tremendous amount of pressure from the FBI and that he wanted to teach in an overseas university or perhaps go into politics in Yemen." However, Awlaki apparently omitted one crucial detail: "He knew that he had been arrested for the solicitation of prostitutes and that any revelation of this by U.S. authorities would have ruined him."[36] This is in reference to Awlaki's two arrests in San Diego in 1996 and 1997 and one in the Washington, D.C., area. He pleaded guilty to the 1997 charge of soliciting a prostitute and was sentenced to three years' probation and a fine.[37]

This is not to suggest that he always supported global terrorism in the name of Islam. Rather, his eventual support for this approach may best be understood as an evolution that is mostly consonant with his early beliefs.

## The Salafi Spectrum

Theologically, Awlaki's religious creed (*aqidah*) was closest to that of the Salafi movement throughout his career. He believed in relying almost solely upon the primary texts, called for Muslims to emulate Muhammad and his companions, and rejected the application of reason and philosophy to theological interpretation. He took on the outward appearance of a Salafi. His progression toward violence was a process that involved the crossing of boundaries between different forms of this belief system. Due to the evolving and fluid nature of this movement and the impact it has had on politics and political violence, in recent years Salafism has attracted the attention not only of Islamic studies scholars but also of political scientists and historians. It has been the subject of a variety of books that have demonstrated what an amorphous, transnational, and complex movement it has become.[2]

The theology of Salafism is rooted in the works of Ibn Taymiyya and his student Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya, fourteenth-century scholars of the Hanbali school of Islam. According to Ibn Taymiyya, Salafi beliefs are based on a literal interpretation of the primary Islamic texts that attempts to understand the physical aspects of God himself: "the way of the Salaf is to interpret literally the Quranic verses and *hadith* that relate to the Divine attributes, and without indicating modality and without attributing to him anthropomorphic qualities."[3] Ibn Taymiyya also believed that the introduction in Islamic thought of Aristotelian syllogisms undermined the revelations found in the Koran and the lessons of the *hadith*, or the sayings of the Prophet.[4] The need to make

rational and reasoned arguments for the existence of God is therefore regarded by Salafis as an attack on the very concept of divine revelation upon which Islam is based. Thus, Salafis, rejecting all metaphorical approaches to reading the texts, believe that any description of God must be taken literally.[5]

Along with its call to bring Islam back to the authentic beliefs and practices of *al-salaf al-salih* (the first three generations of Muslims), Salafi theology is, according to Haykel, based on five further key claims. Arguably the most important and influential of these is *tawhid,* or the belief in the unity of God as the sole deity to be worshipped. The preservation of monotheism by speaking and acting against unbelief and idol worship (*shirk*) and by removing innovative beliefs and practices (*bida*) among Muslims make up the third and fourth aspects of Salafism. This system of belief is based on the claims that only the Koran, the *hadith* collections, and the consensus of Muhammad's companions can be relied upon as authentic sources of Islamic knowledge and that a literal interpretation of these texts is all that Muslims require to understand their faith, regardless of time or context.[6]

While the teachings of Ibn Taymiyya formed the basis for future Salafi thought, it was a theologian from the Najd region of the Arabian Peninsula who revived and refined them in a way that influences the movement today.[7] In the early 1740s, Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab surveyed the Islamic landscape and concluded that most Muslims had strayed from the path of *tawhid*. He believed that contemporary Muslims in Arabia had reverted to a time of religious ignorance ( *jahiliyyah*). In both their practices and beliefs, they took on elements of pre-Islamic idolatry and the influences of reason and critical thinking. Innovations such as this had destroyed the faith, and Muslims were committing idolatry by worshipping spirits ( *jinn*), praying at grave sites, and making sacrifices to deities other than God. The answer, for Abd al-Wahhab, was a reapplication and renewal of *tawhid,* a doctrine designed to reinstate and purify Islamic monotheism after it was corrupted by these

new practices and interpretations. Muslims had to profess belief in Allah and him alone and pray to him as the sole deity. In response Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab developed three interrelated forms of *tawhid: tawhid al-rububiyya* (the affirmation of the oneness of God), *tawhid al-asma wa-al-sifat* (God is one in his names and attributes), and *tawhid al-uluhiyya* (God as the sole deity worthy of worship).[8]

Jihad, Abd al-Wahhab concluded, was the primary method to fight back against the growing tide of religious innovation. He led a revivalist campaign to cleanse Islam, sweeping through the Arabian Peninsula with a ferocity that in 1744 caught the attention of Muhammad ibn al-Saud, the emir of Ad-Diriyyah in what is today Saudi Arabia. He saw Abd al-Wahhab's ideas as an opportunity to lend religious legitimacy to his family's political ambitions to rule the region. The pact between Abd al-Wahhab and al-Saud led to the creation of the first Saudi state and eventually to the creation of Saudi Arabia in 1932. The descendants of Abd al-Wahhab, the Al al-Shaykh family, formed the religious establishment of the country, while the al-Saud family made up the political elite of the Saudi royal dynasty.[9] Followers of Abd al-Wahhab's teachings in Saudi Arabia, who make up much of the religious establishment, are commonly referred to as "Wahhabis," a term that is often erroneously used interchangeably with Salafi.

While all Salafis (Wahhabis included) share the same basic creed, which revolves around the centrality of *tawhid,* they differ in the methodology (*manhaj*) they pursue for its implementation and the form their proselytizing (*dawah*) should take.[10] Salafism in Western academic literature has traditionally been categorized into three strands: purists (also often referred to as quietists), politicos (also known as activist, or *haraki,* Salafis), and jihadis.[11] While imperfect, this framing is generally useful in explaining the similarities of and differences between Salafis.[12]

The purist, or quietist, Salafis are those who usually closely follow the Wahhabi Saudi religious establishment line and call for absolute obedience to the legitimate ruler (*wali al-amr*) of any Muslim country

they are based in. They reject political involvement or political frames within their discourse, at least until a time when Islam is "purified" of innovation and other evils.[13] As part of this belief, they also often oppose the creation of formal groups, political activism, or fighting in circumstances where Muslims are being oppressed. The main practices they support are a process of grassroots education (*tarbiyah*), intended to prepare the masses for the organic creation of an Islamic state, and peaceful *dawah.* Due to their views on politics, quietist Salafis fiercely reject Islamist ideology, viewing it as a sinful innovation that must be purged from the faith. The most influential Saudi-based scholars with whom this strand is most closely associated are Muhammad Nasiruddin al-Albani, Abd al-Aziz ibn Baz, Muhammad ibn al-Uthaymeen, Muhammad Aman al-Jami, and Rabee al-Madkhali.[14]

In contrast to the quietists, politically activist Salafis represent a convergence between Salafi theology and Islamist ideology.[15] This category of Salafism is influenced by the Muslim Brotherhood and is more acquainted with the political process, elections, and geopolitics than those in the quietist category.[16] Due to their adoption of Islamism, activist Salafis believe that they are best placed to contextualize and frame Salafi *aqidah* so that it offers solutions and responses to contemporary political issues. They do not usually engage in, or call for, revolutionary violence in support of their cause, but in some cases they do call for the removal of "un-Islamic" regimes in the Arab world.[17]

Activist Salafis are often either involved in party politics, such as Egypt's Hizb al-Nour, or engaged in contentious political debate and activism, such as the *Sahwa* in Saudi Arabia during the 1990s.[18] While Lacroix has provided the authoritative account of the *Sahwa,* it is important to briefly discuss its ideological contours and global influence due to the impact its approach has had on activist and jihadi Salafism. Described as a "hybrid of Wahhabism and the ideology of the Muslim Brotherhood," it is arguably the single most influential activist Salafi movement.[19] Founded in the 1970s, movement members challenged the

Saudi state with demands to further involve religious figures in the running of government and to reduce the influence of the royal family. Their activism centered around petitions, letters, and the establishment of formal organizations.[20] The movement reached its peak in the early 1990s, when its members coalesced around their vehement rejection of the Saudi state's invitation to American troops into the Arabian Peninsula during the first Gulf War. While during the early phases of the *Sahwa* the Saudi government sought to coopt the activist power of the movement, the agitation it caused during the Gulf War led to a widespread crackdown in 1994 in which many of the leaders of the *Sahwa* were arrested.

During its early years, however, *Sahwa* members used a variety of methods to gain support from both the religious establishment and the royal family. Its main ideologues, for example, worked to find common ground between the country's rigid religious conservatism and Islamism's revolutionary political ideas. An important part of this effort was their argument that Islamist ideology had much in common with Wahhabi teachings and could be legitimated using the works of Ibn Taymiyya and Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab. The central figures behind this movement, including scholars such as Salman al-Awdah, Safar al-Hawali, Muhammad Surur bin Nayif Zayn al-Abidin, and Mohammad Qutb (the brother of Muslim Brotherhood ideologue and leader Sayyid Qutb), helped to oversee this ideological cross-pollination between Salafist theology and Islamist / Muslim Brotherhood ideology and activism.[21]

Muhammad Qutb's main contribution involved reconciling his brother's ideas with Saudi Wahhabism. Arguably his biggest achievement was devising *tawhid al-hakimiyya,* which added a fourth component to Abd al-Wahhab's three forms of *tawhid.* A concept that drives both activist and Salafi-jihadist belief and practice today, it derived from Muslim Brotherhood ideologue Sayyid Qutb's formulation of the doctrine of *hakimiyya,* which he developed in his 1964 work *Milestones.*

Published in Egypt during the era of secular Arab nationalist President Gamal Abdel Nasser, the book argued that the root of the ills of the Muslim world was its embrace of secularism and the influences of imperial Western powers. He thus argued that God should be considered the sole sovereign (*hakim*) over the affairs of man. As such, Muslim societies must be ruled by laws set out in the Koran, otherwise they were in a state of disbelief (*jahiliyyah*) and the ruling government could theoretically be excommunicated and overthrown.[22] Two years after the publication of *Milestones,* Sayyid Qutb was executed by the Egyptian state after he was convicted of involvement in a plot to assassinate President Nasser.

However, Sayyid Qutb's revolutionary approach did not just present a threat to the Egyptian state but was also feared by the Saudis. His brother therefore needed to convince them that Qutb's teachings were in line with Wahhabi thought. Muhammad Qutb achieved this by arguing that *hakimiyya* is a form of al-Wahhab's *tawhid al-uluhiyya* (God as the sole deity worthy of worship) and that if God is the sole deity to be worshipped, he should also be the sole creator of law. Accepting laws other than those laid out by God in the Koran should, he argued, be seen as a sinful form of idol worship (*shirk*) that placed man-made law above that of *sharia.* This concept, Muhammad Qutb concluded, should not therefore be seen as an innovation but rather one that made al-Wahhab's teachings more explicit through emphasizing the sovereignty of God.[23]

Few of the *Sahwa* leaders or thinkers supported militancy in Saudi Arabia.[24] This fusion of Islamist political doctrine with Salafi theology did, however, lead to other alternative and more violent outcomes, namely the ideology of Salafi-jihadism.[25] The emergence of the activist strand was an important part of the creation of Salafi-jihadism because it injected political activism into traditionalist Salafism, which then opened up the possibility of a variety of different reactions to local and global events. Once contentious political activism was embraced as a legitimate method by Salafis, the shape that that activism

could take also became open to debate. While much activism was based around vocal opposition, protests, and open letters criticizing the establishment, others took a more radical approach and decided that violence was the only effective form of activism to achieve real change.[26]

The jihadi and activist strands share a number of important similarities and are closer together than either of them is to the quietists. Jihadis and activists both see politics as integral to the faith. They are committed to *tawhid al-hakimiyya* and can therefore trace their ideological influences back to Islamist thinkers including Sayyid Qutb and Abul A'la Maududi, the founder of the South Asian Islamist political party Jamaat-e-Islami.[27] While activists do not practice violent *takfir* (the violent excommunication of Muslims who do not implement or follow *sharia* law), their affinity with Islamist ideology means that both strands also share the belief that a Muslim leader who rules by man-made laws is potentially an unbeliever. Some have argued that several of the original Salafi-jihadists are radicalized activist Salafis who initially supported nonviolent activism but later adopted violence after concluding that the former was either too slow or too ineffective in bringing about their desired changes.[28]

Salafis who fall into the activist category may issue genuine criticisms of jihadi groups, though they still hold underlying beliefs that condemn not the idea but rather the timing and nature of jihadi action. This is particularly significant in the context of understanding Awlaki's own evolution into a Salafi-jihadist. He and other influential Salafi sheikhs in the United States who went on to become supportive of jihad began as activist Salafis whose position on jihad was subject to a shift from theory to practice depending on the geopolitical context. This has not historically been a one-way street, however. In other cases, activist Salafis have moved from more radical ideas to relative moderation. One of the most cited cases of this is that of Salman al-Awdah, who, upon

his release from prison in 1999, walked back on his earlier support for jihad against non-Muslim rulers and suicide bombing.[29]

The theological component of the Salafi-jihadist movement was also originally established by pioneering Salafi sheikhs influenced by the emergence of activist Salafism and the popularity of the approach adopted by *Sahwa*. These include Saudi-based clerics such as Hamud bin Uqla al-Shuaybi and Sulayman al-Ulwan and ideologues like Yusuf al-Uyayree and Abu Qatada, all of whom were influenced by the writings of Sayyid Qutb.[30] Yusuf al-Uyayree, an al-Qaeda ideologue whose work was an inspiration for Awlaki, was, according to Meijer, involved in constant dialogue with the *Sahwa* while he was active in al-Qaeda and "always regarded himself as part of that [*Sahwa*] movement."[31] While al-Uyayree criticized *Sahwa* sheikhs for not engaging in violent jihad against the Saudi state, he saw them as ideological brethren due to their willingness to comment on political matters concerning Muslims and saw al-Qaeda as a more militant expression of the same movement.[32]

Salafi-jihadism differs from quietist and activist Salafism primarily due to its ideological belief in the primacy and legitimacy of jihad over all other practices. Activist and jihadi Salafis also differ in the form of jihad they support and what represents a legitimate target for attack. The former may advocate for what is termed classical jihad as it has stronger roots in *sharia* law, while jihadis practice a more radical version, namely global jihad. Both of these support fighting against non-Muslims who are seen as occupying Muslim lands. However, the classical approach, which is most commonly associated with Abdullah Azzam and the jihad against the Soviets in Afghanistan, is rooted in guerrilla warfare waged against occupying militaries. Global jihadism, under the initial influence of Osama bin Laden and Ayman al-Zawahiri, places emphasis on mass-casualty terrorism against noncombatants within nations seen as spearheading the oppression of Muslims around

the globe.[33] The global jihad approach is also much more open than the classical approach to the practice of *takfir*.[34]

Together with jihad, *takfir*, and *tawhid al-hakimiyya*, Salafi-jihadists also follow an extreme interpretation of the doctrine of *al-wala wal-bara*.[35] This doctrine and its specific application by Salafi-jihadists constitute perhaps the best example of a Salafi doctrine radicalized in Salafi-jihadist thought.[36] Within the wider Salafi movement, *al-wala wal-bara*, which denotes loyalty (*wala*) toward Muslims and enmity (*bara*) against and disavowal of non-Muslims, is one that is applied so as to define and activate boundaries between "rightly guided" Muslims on one side and "deviant" Muslims in addition to non-Muslims on the other. Quietists use it as a mechanism to prevent Muslims from allowing their religion and Islamic identity (*shaksiyah*) to be diluted or corrupted by other religions and cultures. They warn that Muslims must show their loyalty only to their fellow believers and avoid unnecessary contact with non-Muslims, rejecting their beliefs and practices as well as all "interfaith dialogue" with other religions.[37] Ibn Taymiyya, inspired by the work of earlier Hanbali scholars, developed it into a fully fledged doctrine with the purpose of preserving the purity of Islam as defined in the Koran and *hadith* and creating a devoted and ideological group of followers. Wagemakers also identifies *al-wala wal-bara* as a means used by modern-day Salafis of all stripes to clearly convey the war on Islam to their followers because it "establishes such a clear dichotomy between 'pure' Islam and everything else that it lends itself perfectly to the frequent attempts by Salafis to frame Islam as being under attack."[38]

This concept is especially relevant and popular among Western Salafis, whose audiences are often made up of Muslims who have daily interactions with Western culture and find themselves in a minority. Take, for example, the words of Abdur Raheem Green, a popular Western Salafi preacher who is considered a quietist: "The prophet warned us, be careful who you take as your friend, because you will

take your *deen* [religion] from your friend. This is one of the reasons why Allah has warned us in his book: 'do not take the disbelievers as your *auliya* [allies], do not take the Jews and the Christians, or the *mushrikin* [polytheists] as your *auliya*.' . . . Do not prefer them to the believers, do not prefer their company to the company of the believers."[39]

On the other end of the Salafi spectrum, Salafi-jihadists apply *al-wala wal-bara* in an expressly political and violent fashion. Specifically, it is used to formulate the justifications for fighting jihad against rulers in Muslim-majority countries who do not fully apply the *sharia* and follow man-made laws. While Kepel informs us that Islamist thinkers like Qutb and Maududi already developed much of this legislative critique from a political and activist standpoint, a more theologically in-depth treatment was provided by the Jordanian Salafi-jihadist ideologue Abu Muhammad al-Maqdisi.[40]

In his work, al-Maqdisi, who drew upon Qutb's conception of *hakimiyya*, presented these rulers as polytheists and idols (*tawaghit*) due to their "worship" of mad-made laws over those of Allah. Unlike the Islamist thinkers who preceded him, al-Maqdisi added a new interpretation of the Salafi concept of *al-wala wal-bara* to bolster this line of argument.[41] According to Wagemakers, he "turned [the doctrine] from a quietist tool to purify the religion into an instrument for revolution."[42] Any Muslim who adopts man-made law is, according to al-Maqdisi, committing *shirk* and is an apostate who has pledged his or her loyalty (*wala*) to the forces of unbelief. Muslims are obligated to fight jihad against these rulers as a declaration of disavowal (*bara*) and in order to establish the law of Allah.[43] Al-Maqdisi's most influential work, *Millat Ibrahim*, begins with a "declaration of disavowal" that outlines the main targets of a pious Muslim's *bara*: "To the transgressing rulers [*tawaghit*] of every time and place . . . we say: 'Verily, we are free from you and whatever you worship besides Allah. Free from your wretched laws, methodologies, constitutions and values . . . free from your repugnant governments, courts, distinguishing characteristics and media. . . . We

ensure their survival. They had to emerge from their media-induced torpor and realize that it was only a matter of time before similar measures were taken against them. The Jews and Christians, through CNN and other media outlets ("the mouthpieces of the *shaytan*"), aimed to "deceive" Muslims into a false sense of security. They had, said Awlaki, echoing Malcolm X, been "bamboozled."[108]

As well as identifying social and religious boundaries for Western Muslims, Awlaki needed to further define the nature of the identity they needed to adopt. To this end, he deployed a concept found in the *hadith* and described by Muhammad as *al-taifa al-mansura*. Translated as "those who have been ordained victorious by God" or "the victorious group," this term is used as an identity marker by Salafis of all stripes. It describes the righteous Muslims who follow Islam as set out in the Koran and *hadith* and is especially popular with Salafi-jihadists who use this to define themselves in order to bolster and legitimize their claims of being the only group who have both the proper *aqidah* and are pursuing the correct actions to implement it.[109] According to Meijer, for Salafi-jihadists *al-taifa al-mansura* embodies these two aspects: "It is in this action and knowledge embodied in jihad that the vanguard, the 'victorious group,' manifests itself and sets itself apart from those who are not only weak, but are also theologically misguided and factually misinformed."[110]

"There will always be a core group," according to Awlaki, "who are on the straight path until the day of judgement." One of the benefits of being part of this group is that, unlike the majority of Muslims and non-Muslims on earth, they would not need to go through the ordeal of judgment after the grave and will go straight to *jannah* (heaven). Despite the importance of this group, however, its characteristics, as described by Awlaki, are vague, yet nonetheless revealing. Not only do they "follow the *sunnah* [sayings and deeds of the prophet]," but they also "do not fear the blame of the blamers." This is a popular line used by Western jihadists and is often found in global jihadist propaganda. It serves as useful defense mechanism for Westerners who are adopting

this new identity and belief system in societies that widely reject and abhor their actions. God, they are told, has warned that those following the true path will face numerous challenges. They must be prepared for rejection from their societies and even those closest to them. In case his audience were at all unsure about what this meant, Awlaki expanded further, saying that "they don't care what anyone says about them, they don't care what the media says about them, they only care about what Allah says."[111]

Members of this ordained group were also "stern" toward non-Muslims while being "humble" toward their fellow Muslims, a formulation that echoes *al-wala wal-bara*. Finally, and perhaps most tellingly, Awlaki describes their most important and defining characteristic: "they fight jihad . . . for the *haqq* (faith), both defensive and offensive."[112] This may not necessarily demonstrate that Awlaki was trying to steer his audience toward Salafi-jihadism, but he made no effort to contextualize these statements or offer caveats about jihad being a nonviolent, spiritual struggle. While many Salafis refer to themselves as part of *al-taifa al-mansura*, quietists in particular stress that the defining feature of this group is that it follows the creed of Muhammad and his companions (the *aqidah* of *Ahl as-Sunnah Wal-Jamaah*), not that it pursues violent jihad. By contrast, Awlaki placed heavy emphasis on fighting in his breakdown of the characteristics of the group. This, it is important to remember, was during a period when Awlaki's work was by and large considered mainstream, and this represented an indication of the path he was later to adopt.

Few Salafis operating in America at this time would have discussed jihad in such a loose and ill-defined manner as Awlaki does here. Most would have offered caveats and warnings about practicing it in the modern context lest they run the risk of encouraging militancy, a concern that Awlaki apparently did not share. He concluded his comments on jihad by reminding his followers that "jihad is constant, it never stops." Taken in combination with his focus on *al-taifa al-mansura*, this belief is strikingly similar to that found in Saudi Arabian al-Qaeda

ideologue Yusuf al-Uyayree's *Constants on the Path of Jihad*, which was written and made available online around the time Awlaki made these statements.[113] Roughly five years later, in 2005, Awlaki would endorse this work and translate it from Arabic into English, marking his public conversion to Salafi-jihadism. That he appeared to be quoting from it half a decade previously while still a preaching in the West raises a number of questions about his early beliefs and influences.

This is one of a number of examples of Awlaki expressing beliefs in his early years that are usually considered the preserve of Salafi-jihadists. He was, for instance, also open to the legitimacy of the tactic of suicide bombing and relied again upon a teaching most closely associated with al-Uyayree's writings in order to justify such an act. During his "Life of Muhammad" lecture series Awlaki provides various examples of important figures in pre-Islamic Christianity who died in defense of Abrahamic monotheism and turns to a story from a *hadith* in Sahih Muslim about the King and the Boy. This is a tale of a dying, idolatrous sorcerer-king in Yemen who, in the search for his successor, finds a young boy who is skilled in magic. The boy, however, soon converts to monotheism under the guidance of a Christian priest and rejects the beliefs of his king. When news of the boy worshipping only God reaches the king, he attempts on numerous occasions to have the boy killed, only to be thwarted by divine intervention. The boy finally informs the king how he could end his life—tie him to a tree and shoot an arrow at him after uttering the words "Bismillah [in the name of God], the Lord of the boy," all in front of a large audience. The king duly follows these instructions and the boy is killed. But the entire audience converts to Islam once the king utters the word "Bismillah," making the boy's death a noble act of martyrdom that assists in the spread of monotheism.

While this may not seem to be an obviously problematic story, it represents a significant red flag. The story of the King and the Boy is used almost exclusively by Salafi-jihadist theorists, who use it to justify the

practice of suicide bombing. Indeed, Yusuf al-Uyayree had already used the same story to justify the tactic. In a pamphlet he wrote in 2000, "The Islamic Ruling on the Permissibility of Martyrdom Operations," al-Uyayree argued that suicide attacks do not go against Koranic injunctions against suicide and are legitimate both because they are a response to the larger forces of the enemy and because they offer benefits to the *ummah*.[114] In order to back this claim up, he referenced the *hadith* about the King and the Boy, claiming that "it is the strongest of evidences for this issue [the legitimacy of suicide operations]."[115] The boy tells the king to kill him with the intention furthering Islam, making it the death of a martyr and not an act of suicide.

This is, almost verbatim, what Awlaki also told his audience: "This is one of the many evidences given for the justification of what is referred to as suicide bombers. . . . There are restrictions on when it is allowed and where, but the conduct itself, of a person giving up his own life for Allah is a valid one. . . . The boy did it for a noble cause."[116] Awlaki would repeat this story again during his time in the West. While in the United Kingdom, he gave a series of lectures called "Companions of the Ditch," which was produced and distributed by British-based Islamic publication company called al-Noor. He was more explicit this time, telling his audience that the lessons taken from the tale of the King and the Boy were "especially important now."[117] When asked about the best methods available to Muslims in order to help spread Islam just as the boy had done, and cultivate their own faith, Awlaki responded that "every *ibadah* [form of worship] that is done contributes." He listed the various standard practices that are recognized as the five pillars of Islamic observance, including praying five times a day (*salah*) and making the pilgrimage to Mecca (*hajj*). He also, however, included the option to "go to jihad" without any effort to contextualize or offer further explanation. The inclusion of jihad as *ibadah* again reveals his increasingly Salafi-jihadist tendencies, as no other interpretation gives jihad such prominence.[118]

Similar to Awlaki's apparent reliance on *Constants on the Path of Jihad*, it is hard to imagine where else he would have drawn this if not from the work of al-Uyayree, a known jihadist scholar whom he would later rely heavily upon as he turned more openly to Salafi-jihadism. This raises further questions about what Awlaki's longer-term intentions at this stage were. While unlikely, it is not beyond the realm of possibility that this was his own jihadist version of *tarbiyah* in the West, reflecting his desire to lay the groundwork for a future, indigenous Western Salafi-jihadist movement.

Another problematic aspect of Awlaki's early teachings was his apparent sympathy toward the notion of *takfir* in relation to Muslim governments and leaders that do not implement *hakimiyya*. When asked by a member of the audience during a discussion on the Koran in the early 2000s how Muslims should regard those who do not rule by God's law, Awlaki replied that "the opinion of every Muslim scholar worthy of knowledge is that whoever does not rule by the Book of Allah has left the fold of Islam. That is an issue that is not up for debate."[119] This is a striking statement, one that again helps to place Awlaki at some distance from the quietist Salafi strands active in the United States at the time. This position is, however, also rare for activist Salafis who, while contesting Muslim states and their perceived failure to fully implement Islam, do not usually go so far as to excommunicate them. *Takfir* of this type is pursued almost exclusively by Salafi-jihadists.

While his discussion of jihad as *ibadah*, *takfir*, and suicide bombing certainly complicates matters, the most accurate categorization for Awlaki during his early years would be activist Salafism but with a propensity toward components of jihadi thought. Like other activist Salafis, he would often cite the teachings of Islamist ideologues and recommended them to students. When, during the recording of a lecture he gave in 2002, a student asked him for recommendations of reliable Koranic exegesis, his answer was as follows: "As for thoughts and ideas about the Quran which may not fall under the category of *tafseer*

[Koranic exegesis] but more of a contemplation of Quran [I recommend] *Fi Zhilaal-il-Quran* by Sayyid Qutb and *Tafkeem ul Quran* by Abul A'la Mawdudi."[120]

Qutb was especially influential on Awlaki's thinking at the time, and he relied upon the ideologue's interpretation of *jahiliyyah* to describe the world his audience was living in at the time. *Jahiliyyah*, as he understood it, "is a time period but it is also conduct, whenever you have a time that resembles the pre-Islamic era, it is called *jahiliyyah* and you will find that Sayyid Qutb uses this word a lot in reference to the times that we are living in. He says that there is a lot of resemblance between it and the early *jahiliyyah*."[121] In theological and historical terms, *jahiliyyah* refers to the period before the revelations of Allah through Muhammad and the subsequent foundation of Islam. However, taken up by Qutb, it became a methodical denunciation of the modern secular world that he used to attack the moral bankruptcy that was a product of man's denial of God's sovereignty (*hakimiyya*).[122] In Qutb's interpretation, *jahiliyyah* referred to any society, group, or individual in any period of time that rejected the implementation of God's law.[123] As with his discussion of jihad, Awlaki's reliance upon and recommendation of the work of ideologues like Qutb and Maududi again placed him apart from the quietist Salafis who were operating in America at the time, many of whom who were engaged in attacking the influence of Islamist ideology on Salafi creed, a mixture they regarded as the root of extremism.

Some of Awlaki's early contemporaries also note that he had a propensity toward Islamist ideology and believe that this heavily influenced his future ideological trajectory. Jamaal Zarabozo, one of the first American Salafi converts who was an influential figure in American Salafism during the 1980s and 1990s when Awlaki was emerging onto the scene, does not even class Awlaki as a Salafi. Instead, he regards him as more influenced by Islamism: "His work was never in-depth or sophisticated enough for me to consider him a Salafi, and I

focused on traditional Salafi themes related to *aqidah* and *fiqh*. Awlaki, however, offered a form of activist Salafism that many different Islamic groups would agree with. He focused almost solely on the virtues of living like Muhammad and his companions while avoiding the more contentious topics related to belief and practice. This is also why, while in the United Kingdom, Awlaki was embraced by a wide variety of rival Islamist groups, from those influenced by the Muslim Brotherhood and Jamaat-e-Islami to the revolutionary Islamist political party Hizb ut-Tahrir and other various shades of Islamist and Salafi. He was able to transcend the factional divisions within Western Islamist and other conservative Islamic groups and as a result was able to attract Western Muslims from a variety of backgrounds.

Awlaki's approach and early popularity also help to explain the appeal of his later calls for jihad. He had already gained a large audience and following, many of whom saw him as the modern voice of Islam in the West. It is notable, therefore, that his early work is cited by radicalized Westerners as much as any of his later jihadist materials. As the analysis of Nidal Hasan in Chapter 5 will show, the Fort Hood shooter identified Awlaki's 2001 "Lives of the Prophets" lecture as the work that had impacted him the most, over and above the more explicit calls to jihad. Similarly, Dzhokhar Tsarnaev, one of the two brothers who carried out the Boston Marathon bombings in April 2013, was also influenced by Awlaki's work and recommended to his Twitter followers a month before the attack that they "listen to Anwar al Awlaki's (a shaheed iA) the here after series, you will gain an unbelievable amount of knowledge."[143] This was in reference to Awlaki's "The Hereafter" series of lectures in which he discussed the various stages of the afterlife—the series contained no discussion of politics or jihad. Other studies have also found that Awlaki's early, less explicitly violent work continues to be very popular among jihadists. In Donald Holbrook's analysis of media found in the possession of forty-eight individuals either convicted of terrorism offenses or killed carrying out attacks in

the United Kingdom between 2004 and 2017, Awlaki's work was the most widespread among them; in that group, four out of his six most popular titles were his *sira*, history, and afterlife lectures.[144]

Had Awlaki emerged as a public figure after the 9/11 attacks and begun preaching jihad with no previous background as an imam, it is unlikely that he would have had the same traction with Western Muslims. His previous work provided the basis for his perceived legitimacy and helped convince many observers that Salafi-jihadism was an inherent part of the religion as he had already presented it. In contrast to the openly jihadist preachers operating in Britain around that time, such as Abdullah al-Faisal, Omar Bakri Muhammad, and Abu Hamza al-Masri, who were rejected by the majority of Western Muslims, Awlaki was not regarded as beyond the pale by mainstream Islamic organizations.[145] This meant that large numbers of Muslims were exposed to his work, as he had been presented to them as a legitimate scholar.

The preceding analysis of Awlaki's early works and ideological inspirations has sought to more accurately categorize his beliefs while simultaneously offering two interrelated factors that may have contributed to his future support for jihadism: the form of Salafism he chose and his lack of scholarly training and connections to a wider network of scholars. While there is no precise way to define Awlaki's ideology, and the current accepted categories of Salafism are themselves imperfect, an analysis of his work and ideological influences sets him distinctly apart from the quietist strand. This can be seen in his willingness to engage in politics and to urge his followers to take part in activism as well as his open criticism of Muslims who shun activism in favor of study. In addition, some of his earliest scholarly influences are derived from Yemeni sheikhs with strong ties to Yemeni activist Salafis and Islamists.

Although activist Salafism does not provide a direct pathway to Salafi-jihadism, in Awlaki's case it ensured that, rather that remaining constant, he had the ability to change his beliefs depending on how he

viewed the political situation of Muslims in the West and beyond. This ideological malleability and openness to the use of violence is seen in his earliest sermons, in which Awlaki demonstrated a strong sympathy for components of Islamist ideology that also form the basis for Salafi-jihadist violence. He not only adopted the Qutbist interpretation of *jahiliyyah*, but his tacit support for *tawhid al-hakimiyya* also led him to pronounce *takfir* on Muslim leaders who did not fully implement Islam. He also relied upon a version of *al-wala wal-bara* that, while initially based only on separating Western Muslims and defining and protecting their collective identity, would gradually become more extreme as he moved toward jihadism. The most obvious signs of what was to come, however, were Awlaki's reference to jihad as *ibadah* and his use of the King and the Boy parable as a justification for suicide bombing. This places him among only a small handful of Salafis who support this tactic, the vast majority of whom are Salafi-jihadists. As we shall see in the following chapter, these ideological leanings meant that Awlaki's initial calls for nonviolent activism were subject to revision. This was especially the case in the years following 9/11, when he perceived the threat to Islam to be growing and evolving while also concluding that nonviolent activism was ineffective.

Although Awlaki was influenced and, according to his own account, trained by a well-respected family of sheikhs in Yemen, his lack of any strong and longstanding connections to scholars is the second factor to consider when assessing how and why he turned to global jihad. By contrast, the purist Madkhali strand that existed in the United States was largely inoculated from adopting Salafi-jihadist thought, and none of the movement's leadership figures in the United States changed their views in response to 9/11 and the War on Terror. This was largely due to their unquestioning devotion to the Saudi establishment sheikhs and visceral hatred for Islamist ideology and its influence on Salafism. Awlaki's beliefs and their application, however, faced no such impediments. As a result, he had neither a clear ideological compass nor the skills (nor

the inclination) to fully refute Salafi-jihadist ideology, making him more open to drastic changes in belief and methodology.

The question of where Awlaki initially fit into the Salafi spectrum aside, his early works also display the beginnings of a construction of a set collective action frames that would also evolve toward support for violence. Even in his earliest lectures, Awlaki used a mix of Islamic scripture, history, and current affairs to provide a diagnosis for the plight of Muslims in America and abroad. Western culture and society were engaged in an ideological and physical effort to undermine, change, and eventually destroy Islam. Meanwhile, Muslims were failing to respond appropriately due to a lack of knowledge about the history of Muhammad and the Salaf as well as a failure to take up political activism. While Awlaki was sympathetic to forms of classical jihad in Bosnia and Chechnya and supported the Hamas terror campaign against Israel during the Second Intifada, he had not yet adopted the prognostic frames of the global jihad movement. Muslims in America were not called upon to take up arms and commit terrorist attacks, as Awlaki would later encourage. They had to "deal with issues that are directly relating to our community, to our needs" by conducting *dawah*, learning Islamic history, and taking part in activist groups.[146] Thus, his prognostic framing was centered around *tarbiyah*, fostering a sense of Islamic brotherhood and, in doing so, adopting a collective identity defined by a shared faith and desire to help the *ummah*. While his diagnostic framing and method of teaching would remain largely consistent throughout his career, the discernible change in his framing could be seen in the actions he called upon his followers to undertake in order to change the plight of the *ummah*. His early sympathy toward elements of Salafi-jihadist ideology meant that he was able to shift from activist solutions to violent ones without any drastic change in the doctrines he preached or the sources he used.

This analysis notably lacks an emphasis on the influence of external factors on Awlaki's eventual embrace of jihadism. It is important to

acknowledge that the War on Terror undoubtedly had a significant impact on him, as evidenced by his sermons during its incipient phases both at home and abroad. Similarly, his apparent ill treatment by the FBI while still in America would have helped confirm his long-held suspicions about the West's animosity toward Islam and contributed to his support of those Muslims whom he saw as willing to fight back. Nonetheless, given what has been uncovered in Awlaki's earliest works, it is reasonable to argue that his eventual turn to violence was deeply influenced both by his view of the world and his willingness to modify his religious positions depending on the geopolitical context. As events relating to Muslims changed after 9/11, so did Awlaki. From the very start of his career as a preacher, he expressed a significant level of animosity toward America and an acceptance of some of the main pillars of Islamist and Salafi-jihadist thought. Over the coming years, these would only fester and grow.

# 3

# Awlaki and Salafi-Jihadism: Theory and Praxis

A s Awlaki's activist Salafi ideology came up against the War on Terror era, he began to conclude that political activism would not be enough to stem what he saw as the rising tide of anti-Islam activity both at home and abroad. Concepts and doctrines he had previously adopted and introduced to his audience—most notably jihad, *al-wala wal-bara*, and *al-taifa al-mansura*—would now begin to take on increasingly radical forms as his perception of the immediacy of the threat changed. His willingness to adapt his activist methodology in response to a shifting political and social environment, along with a preexisting sympathy toward Salafi-jihadism, meant that his move toward this belief system faced few serious ideological impediments. Awlaki's output up until this point, while politically oriented and at times sprinkled with Salafi-jihadi sentiment, offered his audience only a vague set of solutions. He pushed them to the edge with constant warnings of an existential threat that were often interspersed with stories glorifying jihad campaigns during the early years of Islam. However, it was not until 2005 that Awlaki would explicitly call upon his followers to take part in violence.

to cheapen the nature of the movement but also backfire due to the likelihood that Muslims may end up being victims of such random attacks, leading to a loss of support from within the *ummah*.[56]

Another concern brought up by Bin Laden related to *aqd al-aman,* or the covenant of security. An ideological sticking point for more traditional jihadists, this refers to a belief that when they accept citizenship or a visa from a non-Muslim country, a Muslim enters into a contract whereby they have taken an oath before God not to harm the nation in question.[57] If an American citizen follows the instructions in *Inspire* and conducts an attack inside America, they could be acting in breach of an agreement with God himself. This issue was addressed by Awlaki in the fourth issue of *Inspire,* in which he provided a ruling that dismissed this obstacle to fighting jihad, arguing that Western nations are at war with Islam and can be classified *dar al-harb* (land of war) rather than *dar al-ahd* (land of covenant). As such, "Muslims are not bound by the covenants of citizenship and visa that exist between them and nations of *dār al-ḥarb*."[58]

This was not a view shared by Bin Laden, however, who apparently continued to respect this notion until his death. In a letter written to senior al-Qaeda member Attiya al-Libi, he noted the case of Faisal Shahzad, a naturalized American citizen who attempted to detonate a bomb in Times Square in May 2010 after being inspired by Awlaki's work.[59] Bin Laden closely followed the ensuing court case and noticed that Shahzad claimed to have lied when he took his oath before receiving his American citizenship. Bin Laden criticized this, writing that "it is not permissible in Islam to betray trust and break a covenant . . . getting the American citizenship requires taking an oath to not harm America." He was concerned that such an approach would tarnish the reputation of the movement, warning that "we do not want *al-Mujahidin* to be accused of breaking a covenant."[60]

It seems, however, that other leadership figures began to adopt Awlaki's approach to attacking the West. In mid-2011 as-Sahab, the official

al-Qaeda media outlet, released a video featuring Awlaki and a number of leading al-Qaeda members and respected jihadist scholars including Ayman al-Zawahiri, Abu Yahya al-Libi, and Attiya al-Libi, all of whom were shown endorsing individual jihad in the West. Attiya al-Libi, the recipient of bin Laden's letter urging that the movement adhere to the covenant of security, specifically rejected that it could be applied in the West today: "the opinion that we follow is that the visa is not considered an agreement of security." In addition, he claimed that even if one were to accept the existence of such an agreement, "it can be broken if the disbelievers commit aggression against Islam and Muslims."[61]

The video also depicts a variety of other jihadist leadership figures presenting ideological and tactical justifications for Western Muslims to take up arms against their home countries on their own, with no organizational support or religious sanction. While also providing the usual claims centered around a global war on Islam lead by America, the video is mainly concerned with providing possible solutions to this problem and offering a motivation for Western Muslims to participate in the movement. Religious verses are used to justify the individual jihad approach, and the title of the video is itself a translation of a verse in Koran 4:84: "So fight in the cause of Allah, you are not held responsible except for yourself. And encourage the believers [to join you] that perhaps Allah will restrain the [military] might of those who disbelieve." In the video, the narrator explains that in response to this global aggression, Muslims in the West must "pursue all means approved by the Islamic law to put an end to this barbaric aggression that knows no limit and is not confined to a particular location. . . . When the *mujahidin* call on Muslims, all Muslims, each one according to his ability and capacity, to engage in an open war against these countries that declared war on Muslims, they must know that this is a legitimate demand."[62]

Individual jihad is described by al-Qaeda ideologue Abu Yahya al-Libi in the video as "one person or a small group of *mujahidin* carrying out

a military operation according to the limits of the *Sharia* to harm the enemy and to encourage the Muslims in accordance with the circumstances." Adding an Islamic historical perspective to such acts of violence in the West, he contends that, "this is not new or an innovated action. . . . Individual jihad was performed at the time of the Prophet in a number of operations and some of the heroes of the companions of the Prophet performed it too following the invitation of the Prophet."[63]

The adoption of Awlaki's approach by members of the core al-Qaeda leadership via the as-Sahab media organ suggests that he had more influence over the thinking of the group than previously thought. That this happened despite bin Laden's views on preserving the covenant of security and maintaining operational control of attacks is a testament to Awlaki's growing influence at the time. Taken together with AQAP leader Nasir al-Wuhaishi's letter to Bin Laden requesting that Awlaki be made head of AQAP (which bin Laden rejected), there is reason to believe that Awlaki gained a significant amount of respect among senior members of the group. Had he not been killed soon after, it is possible that Awlaki's reputation would have continued to grow in the eyes of the jihadi elite, earning him further seniority within the al-Qaeda leadership.

This official endorsement from al-Qaeda also represents the apex of Awlaki's career, which was to be cut short just three months later. His journey from popular mainstream preacher to leading jihadist ideologue and strategist, while complex and containing many unanswered questions, is one best defined by circumstance, context, and a fluid ideology. Despite the changes he underwent, his diagnostic framing remained largely consistent. From his earliest works until his final utterances, the problem Muslims faced were presented as the product of a multifaceted war-on-Islam conspiracy led by America. As circumstances changed, particularly after 9/11, so did Awlaki's views on how to solve the problems of the *ummah*. Muslim-majority countries such

as Afghanistan and Iraq became the targets of military operations while Western Muslims faced increased scrutiny and new laws designed to fight domestic terrorism. Apart from governments, wider Western society and culture, in his view, became increasingly hostile to Islam. Its art was used to defame the prophet, while its media was little more than an anti-Muslim propaganda organ, pumping out misinformation and lies aimed at turning the population against Islam. The entire West had become openly hostile to Muslims, and the faithful were foolish to ignore the warning signs.

This elicited a change in Awlaki's prognostic framing. His earlier sermons, influenced by activist Salafism, called upon Western Muslims to put aside their minor differences and join together to push back against the tide of Islamophobia. This, in his view at the time, was to be done through participating in politically active Islamic organizations that used nonviolent means to contest the state. In order to protect their faith, he also urged Muslims to develop a strong Islamic identity through religious education focused on the early history of Islam. After concluding that nonviolent activism was insufficient, he argued that his audience must follow suit by adopting more radical versions of the Salafi doctrines than he had been pushing. Jihad, initially presented as a noble struggle conducted by the Salaf or, in modern times, an endeavor limited to defending Muslim lands, was now a vengeful global project with few rules of engagement. Western civilians, deemed to be complicit in the war on Islam, became legitimate targets and could be pursued and killed anywhere in the world.

Similarly, his deployment *al-wala wal-bara* began as a tool to protect Western Muslim's Islamic identity from Western secular culture. By 2005, it had evolved into a justification for murder. It was no longer enough for Muslims to separate and define themselves against their non-Muslim neighbors. By exploiting their preexisting fears about a rise in anti-Muslim sentiment, Awlaki encouraged them to develop a deep-seated hatred for non-Muslims that ultimately had to manifest itself

into acts of extreme violence. Awlaki saw this use of *al-wala wal-bara* to create in-groups and out-groups, an important component of the recruitment efforts of a variety of extremist groups, as an important first step toward encouraging mobilization.

*Hijrah,* meanwhile, was only introduced in detail during the latter stages of Awlaki's career. It complemented his evolving presentation of *al-wala wal-bara* by further exploiting the identity crisis that some Western Muslims were collectively undergoing and exerting pressure on them to choose an identity and then act upon it. As their countries supposedly turned against Muslims, Awlaki portrayed Western Muslims as involved in a tug-of-war between their Western and Muslim identities. While *al-wala wal-bara* defined the divisions, *hijrah* offered two stark choices: Leave the hostile West or stay and fight back. Muslims who remained in the West and sat on the fence were living in limbo (or, as he called it, a "gray area"); he framed their actions as a betrayal of the *ummah* and their duties to God. By adding a sense of shame to the pressure his audience already felt, he hoped to push many of them to act.

The form this fight-back could take went beyond physical, violent acts. Unlike other Western jihadist preachers, Awlaki paid specific attention to the importance of low-risk activism by offering a variety of prognostic frames related to jihad that did not involve fighting or risking one's life. Works such as "44 Ways to Support Jihad" highlighted the myriad actions through which one could become involved in the movement at the ground floor. He hoped that this would spark a gradual progression toward more high-risk ventures, the pinnacle of which was jihad in the form of terrorist attacks in the West.

Awlaki's motivational framing efforts varied. Like other ideologues, he explained the promises of the afterlife in heaven for those who took part, and in this way differed little from others. Similarly, he spoke of the collective benefits reaped for the *ummah* by taking part in violent action. It was in his appreciation of the power of violence, however,

where Awlaki made his biggest motivational contribution. At a time when al-Qaeda was still hoping to replicate its achievements on 9/11, he had a different mission, which he rapidly convinced much of the al-Qaeda leadership to adopt. Through calling for individual attacks with no centralized organization, he helped to increase the amount of violent jihadist activity in the West, albeit while also reducing the scale and complexity of the attacks themselves. He did not perceive this to be a significant concern, however, because he framed any attack carried out by a Western Muslim in a Western country as evidence of the power and eventual success of the movement. Like terrorist strategists of the past, he recognized the motivational and propagandistic power of the violent act itself. Awlaki believed that such attacks, no matter the scale or success, would have a self-multiplying effect. Similar to the "contagion" phenomenon seen with mass shootings, he hoped that as more attacks were carried out, more jihadist sympathizers would be inspired to follow suit.[64]

Awlaki pursued a variety of frame alignment strategies that ensured that his arguments would resonate with his target audience. His intimate knowledge of what issues mattered to them allowed him to provide urgency and relevance to the global jihad project. He would therefore link his frames to touchstone events concerning Muslims in the West in order to prove the war-on-Islam conspiracy as well as to provide the impetus to fight against it. While this perception was often isolated to the foreign entanglements of Western militaries in Muslim-majority countries, Awlaki sought to make this idea more urgent and personal for his audience by providing examples of its domestic, often ideological, components.

The salience of these frames was also reliant upon Awlaki's long-standing reputation as a respected Islamic scholar. Without this authority, his messaging would have had much less of an impact. Part of the reason for his popularity, a trait that set him apart from other Salafis in the West, was his style of Islamic teaching, which relied heavily upon

Salafi-jihadism. This is because, in the view of this author, Awlaki's re-action to both global events and personal experiences was fundamentally shaped by his preexisting ideological outlook.

We have seen how, during the early stages of his career, Awlaki's output loosely fell into the activist Salafi category. In his lectures, he fused modern geopolitics with Salafi theology, while his references to modern-day *jahiliyyah* and the importance of *tawhid al-hakimiyya* often betrayed the influence of key Islamist ideologues. However, it must be said that many activist Salafis have adopted similar approaches and ex-pressed analogous beliefs without ever turning to jihadism. In Awla-ki's case there were also early signs of a sympathy toward more vio-lent forms of Salafi activism. While he did not begin by openly and unequivocally endorsing violence as a solution, he always held a roman-ticized view of jihad and was open to changing his position on the correct methodology for achieving change. His early endorsement for suicide bombing, a conclusion he reached by relying on the story of the King and the Boy, set him apart from most other Salafis operating in America at the time. This, along with his description of jihad as a con-stant and unchanging form of worship, suggests that he was drawn to the work of Yusuf al-Uyayree years before he openly endorsed the ji-hadist ideologue in his 2005 translation of *Constants on the Path of Jihad.* Even before 2005, while living in England, his decision to highlight for a Western audience Ibn Nuhaas's contribution to justifying violent jihad was questionable at best. Of the numerous more relevant works he could have spent his time translating and discussing, he chose *The Book of Jihad* at a time of heightened tension and increased jihadist activity in the West.

The ideological and methodological flexibility that was to define Awlaki's journey may also have been the result of his lack of scholarly credentials. His activist Salafi outlook, unmoored from the direct guid-ance of any specific sheikhs or scholars, meant that he was far less re-stricted in how he viewed jihad and its implementation and he did not

have to answer to anyone for his views and interpretations. This lack of a powerful scholarly influence along with the Islamist ideological component of his Salafi theology meant that his beliefs were volatile and subject to significant transformation. A gradual change is distinctly noticeable in his judgment of specific Salafi doctrines. His interpre-tation of these became more extreme in reaction to geopolitical shifts that in Awlaki's perception were causing increasing levels of harm to the *ummah.*

The most important of these doctrines is of course jihad. A compo-nent of any strand of Salafi belief, it was always uppermost in Awlaki's thoughts. From a historic perspective, he regularly glorified the mili-tary exploits of Muhammad and the Salaf in his early work. At the same time, the activist component of his ideology as well as his engagement with contemporary geopolitics led him to support the defensive cause of pre-9/11 classical jihad campaigns in places like Afghanistan, Chechnya, and Bosnia. When on 9/11 al-Qaeda announced to the world its brand of global jihadism—defined by the mass killing of civilians in Western countries—it is likely that Awlaki did not embrace this new development fully. This helps in part to explain his initial condemna-tions of al-Qaeda in the months following the attacks. At this early stage of global jihadism, Awlaki may not yet have come to terms with the fact that this was the future of the movement. 9/11 announced to the world that acts of indiscriminate international terrorism were now the new face of Salafi-jihadism, and while Awlaki had yet to catch up with this development, his ideological flexibility coupled with a preexisting sympathy for modern-day jihad meant that it would not take him long to do so. As jihadism evolved, so did he, and within four years of 9/11 he was an open supporter of al-Qaeda.

Not only did 9/11 show Awlaki the future of jihad, but it was also the catalyst for a number of major global events and domestic develop-ments that were to influence his evolution from activist to jihadi Salafism. The most important of these were U.S. military engagements

that came to characterize the early years of the War on Terror era. In Awlaki's eyes, the U.S. invasion and occupation of Muslim-majority countries was more than just a response to the al-Qaeda threat; it was the next stage of a war on Islam that stretched back to the moment the Koran was revealed to Muhammad in the seventh century. Inside the United States, Awlaki also believed that this war was being stepped up through government action such as the passing of the PATRIOT Act, the aggressive pursuit by federal authorities of Islamic organizations, and cultural efforts to redefine the very meaning of Islam and the use of satire to ridicule its prophet.

On the occasions that Awlaki reflected on his own intellectual pathway, he rarely cited any negative personal experiences in order to explain his support for jihad. His explanations instead focused on his abandoning of nonviolent activism after observing a relentless wave of anti-Muslim activity in the West. This, he claimed, eventually convinced him that violence was the only way to save the *ummah* and to do away with man-made law. By allowing his beliefs and methodology to become beholden to global affairs, he became open to adopting and endorsing violence. That his initial beliefs had been influenced by Islamist and jihadist activists, thinkers, and scholars made it all the more likely that he would change his approach.

Despite this, Awlaki's 2006 imprisonment in Yemen is often regarded as a turning point in his career. His mistreatment at the hands of authorities acting on behalf of America, according to this reasoning, pushed him to violence and influenced his decision to join and recruit for al-Qaeda. While it may have had some impact on him, it is important not to overstate the significance of this episode. By the time of his arrest, Awlaki had already produced his translations of Ibn Nuhaas's *Book of Jihad* and Yusuf al-Uyayree's *Constants on the Path of Jihad*.

The argument that Awlaki's transformation can be traced back to the FBI's apparent threat to expose his involvement with prostitutes is equally unconvincing and based on little more than speculation. Some

of those who knew him at the time believe that this is the only way to explain why he left such a promising career as an American Islamic preacher. However, similar to the prison claims, this is not something Awlaki ever publicly addressed. While it may explain his reasons for leaving America and certainly can be considered one of a number of factors, it alone does not account for why he then chose the path of jihadism. Claims that Awlaki simply had "nowhere else to turn" and became radicalized as a result of "blocked ambition" are not sufficient. Even if one was to rely upon personal experiences (or "push factors") as the main reason for his radicalization, it would have to be with the concession that other factors were at play.

What emerges from the analysis of Awlaki's output over the span of roughly fifteen years is that no radical or sudden transformation ever did take place. Among the most striking elements of his evolution is how little he changed his diagnostic framing and the sources he relied upon. Between the late 1990s and 2010, when he officially aligned with al-Qaeda, the only discernible changes in his message were his solutions to the problems facing Islam and Muslims in the West. Patient and long-term Islamic activism was discarded in favor of the instant gratification and apparent results of violence. What brought about this prognostic modification is a question that may never be fully answered, but the evidence suggests that Awlaki took both Salafist and Islamist teachings to conclusions that had already been made intellectually available by the more violent incarnations of both of these movements. One of the main features of this analysis is a demonstration of how Awlaki simply needed a slight adjustment in emphasis, making minor changes in the language and tone he used, in order to justify jihadist violence. It is a testament to the nature of his earlier work that much of it remains popular with Western Salafi-jihadists to this day, and almost none of it contradicts his later support for the global jihad movement.

It is therefore possible to observe a gradual move toward greater support for violence, which itself followed a well-worn path from activist

Salafism to Salafi-jihadism. This path was one that his contemporary and close associate, Ali al-Timimi, forged immediately after 9/11. Unlike Awlaki, however, al-Timimi was more constrained in his approach because of his connections to, and respect for, scholarly authority. Al-Timimi's main criticism of 9/11, for example, was that the perpetrators did not consult with or receive permission from a recognized Salafi scholar before the attack. He embraced a form of classical jihad, which has a much stronger basis in *sharia* law than its global, mass casualty–centered alternative preferred by his less learned friend.

It is not just a coincidence that Awlaki, a Salafi preacher influenced by Islamist trends, became a Salafi-jihadist. The hazy and permeable boundaries that exist between different forms of Salafism and Islamism demonstrate that we cannot ignore the impact of both of these sets of ideas, be they violent or not. Awlaki's own journey to jihadism was the result of a volatile fusion between Salafi theology and Islamist ideology, and he was able to move painlessly along the spectrums of both of these movements until he openly joined al-Qaeda.

That Awlaki underwent an evident ideological evolution goes some way toward explaining his popularity. Because of his established reputation as one of the most reliable sources of Islamic teaching in the English language—a reputation that landed him a senior position at one of the most influential mosques in America—when he began preaching jihad he was better placed than any other English-speaking jihadist ideologue to legitimately argue that Salafi-jihadism represented "true" Islam. Violent jihad, while central to his thought, was presented as merely a part of a grand project to establishing the sovereignty of God on earth. Islam, as he saw it, was the cure to the ills of humanity and provided the blueprint for a utopia based on the vision of God. As much as many would like to dismiss them as such, Awlaki and his followers (and indeed many other Salafi-jihadists) are not simply mindless, bloodthirsty killers. Many are thoughtful individuals driven by a warped sense of altruism; they sincerely see the jihad

project as one aimed at improving humanity. The adoption of terrorism is therefore regarded as a means to an end, rather than violence for its own sake. Awlaki's work assisted in ensuring that the global jihad movement came to be perceived by his followers as the purest representation of Islam, rather than as the sole preserve of any specific individual or group. It would, he hoped, survive the collapse of any organization and the death of any leader. Thus far, the evidence suggests that he was correct.

One of the most powerful features of Awlaki's messaging was his mastery of encouraging violent activism while rarely needing to be explicit. Through his storytelling, which provided a skewed version of history, Islam, Western society, and geopolitics, he was able to take people to the edge of violence. Listeners were made to feel as if their final decision to support or commit an act of terror was the result of a process of rational, fact-based thinking couched in proper religious knowledge. He allowed them to feel a sense of personal agency in their decision-making. One of the numerous examples of this tactic was his justification for killing Western cartoonists and satirists who dared to turn their attention to Islam and its prophet. His lecture on the topic, one of the most detailed of its kind, was given in the context of the Muhammad cartoon controversy and purported to present listeners with the "facts" about how the prophet, whose behavior his followers are told to emulate, dealt with similar matters in his time. Awlaki's conclusion, that Muhammad and his followers responded to similar threats with violence, served as a subtle call to arms while also avoiding accusations of direct incitement to murder from all but the most eagle-eyed observers. This call to violence was so subtle, in fact, that clips from his "Dust Will Never Settle Down" lecture remained openly available on YouTube until the end of 2017 despite the removal of the vast majority of his videos, as it seemingly did not meet the criteria for violating the company's terms of service due to its lack of direct incitement to violence or hatred.[1]

violence. Scott Shane, *Objective Troy: A Terrorist, a President, and the Rise of the Drone* (New York: Tim Duggan Books, 2015), 100, 178.

2. These include: *Global Salafism: Islam's New Religious Movement*, ed. Roel Meijer (London: Hurst, 2009); Shiraz Maher, *Salafi-Jihadism: The History of an Idea* (London: Hurst, 2016); Henri Lauzière, *The Making of Salafism: Islamic Reform in the Twentieth Century* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2015); Robert Rabil, *Salafism in Lebanon: From Apoliticism to Transnational Jihadism* (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2014); Zoltan Pall, *Salafism in Lebanon: Local and Transnational Movements* (Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press, 2018); Francesco Cavatorta, *Salafism After the Arab Awakening: Contending with People's Power* (Oxford, U.K.: Oxford University Press, 2017); Alexander Thurston, *Salafism in Nigeria: Islam, Preaching, and Politics* (Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press, 2016); Laurent Bonnefoy, *Salafism in Yemen: Transnationalism and Religious Identity* (Oxford, U.K.: Oxford University Press, 2012).

3. Translated by Bernard Haykel in Bernard Haykel, "On the Nature of Salafi Thought and Action," in Meijer, ed., *Global Salafism*, 38.

4. One of the best examples of this development is the emergence of the rationalist Mu'tazila school of thought in the eighth century. See Albert Hourani, *Arabic Thought in the Liberal Age, 1798–1939* (Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 142.

5. As Ibn Taymiyya wrote: "One is not to state that the meaning of 'hand' is power or that of 'hearing' is knowledge." Translated by Bernard Haykel in Haykel, "On the Nature of Salafi Thought and Action," 38.

6. Haykel, "On the Nature of Salafi Thought and Action," 38.

7. Madawi al-Rasheed, *A History of Saudi Arabia* (Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 15–19.

8. Stephane Lacroix, *Awakening Islam* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2011), 11. As a result of al-Wahhab's influence on Salafism, the term is often (incorrectly) used interchangeably with Wahhabi. Some Salafis see the term as derogatory. While all Wahhabis can be described as Salafi, not all Salafis follow or support the Saudi Royal Family or the Wahhabi scholars of the country's religious establishment. In addition, unlike Wahhabis who follow the Hanbali school of *fiqh*, Salafis reject the four *madhhabs*. Part of the appeal of Salafism lies in its refusal to be beholden to any of the four schools and its rejection of *taqlid* (conforming to one school of thought) in favor of individual interpretation (*ijtihad*). Not only do Salafis see the *madhhabs* as a form of sinful division among Muslims, but the existence of these schools go against the Salafi belief that there is only one correct approach, that outlined by Allah in the primary sources of Islam.

See Quintan Wiktorowicz, "The New Global Threat: Transnational Salafis and Jihad," *Middle East Policy* 8, no. 4 (2001): 21; Roel Meijer, "Introduction," in *Global Salafism*, ed. Meijer, 4.

9. This is a thumbnail history of Saudi Arabia. For a more in-depth treatment, see David Commins, *The Wahhabi Mission in Saudi Arabia* (London, U.K.: I.B. Tauris, 2009).

10. Quintan Wiktorowicz, "Anatomy of the Salafi Movement," *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism* 29, no. 3 (2006): 208.

11. Wiktorowicz, "Anatomy of the Salafi Movement," 208; Haykel, "On the Nature of Salafi Thought and Action," in *Global Salafism*, ed. Meijer, 47–50.

12. Joas Wagemakers, "Revisiting Wiktorowicz: Categorising and Defining the Branches of Salafism," in *Salafism After the Arab Awakening: Contending with People's Power*, ed. Francesco Cavatorta and Fabio Merone (Oxford, U.K.: Oxford University Press, 2016), 7–10.

13. The leading quietist scholar Muhammad Nasiruddin al-Albani, for example, supported the political notion of an Islamic State, but only after the purification of society through a *manhaj* based on *dawah* and *tarbiyah*. On the teachings of al-Albani, see Stephane Lacroix, "Between Revolution and Apoliticism: Nasir al-Din al-Albani and his Impact on the Shaping of Contemporary Salafism," in *Global Salafism*, ed. Meijer, 58–81.

14. Wagemakers, "Revisiting Wiktorowicz." In this paper, Wagemakers also offers a further three subcategories of quietist Salafis: "Aloofists" inspired by Muhammad Nasiruddin al-Albani; "Loyalists" influenced by Sheikh Abd al-Aziz ibn Baz, the former Grand Mufti of Saudi Arabia, and Sheikh Muhammad ibn al-Uthaymeen; and "propagandists," also referred to by other Salafis as "Madkalis," who take their line from Sheikh Rabee al-Madkhali and define supporting the Saudi regime almost as an article of faith.

15. Roel Meijer, "Politicising *al-jarh wa-l-ta'dil*," in *The Transmission and Dynamics of the Textual Sources of Islam Essays in Honour of Harald Motzki*, ed. Nicolet Boekhoff-van der Voort, Kees Versteegh, and Joas Wagemakers (Leiden, the Netherlands: Brill, 2011), 387–88.

16. Zoltan Pall, "Kuwaiti Salafism and Its Growing Influence in the Levant," Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, May 2014, 23; Madawi al-Rasheed, *Muted Modernists: The Struggle over Divine Politics in Saudi Arabia* (Oxford, U.K.: Oxford University Press, 2015), 12, 77.

17. Wagemakers, "Revisiting Wiktorowicz." It is also worth noting that activist Salafi currents differ from country to country, although in most cases they are associated with Salafi political parties or prominent movements in their area of operation. One of the key early figures